

**“The Way of Hope”**

**Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16**

**December 30, 2018**

**First Sunday after Christmas**

**Pastor Andy Kinsey**

*“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,  
the conviction of things not seen.”*

- Hebrews 11:1

**Prayer of Preparation**

O Lord, give us such faith that we may have the assurance of your grace and find hope in you. In Christ’s name, we pray. Amen.

**Message**

God has a way of doing the best of things in the worst of circumstances. Amen!

There is a story about two New York businessmen who decided to see if they might make some money by introducing bungee-jumping to Mexico. They fronted some venture capital to build a bungee platform where people who liked "extreme sports" could dive off and spring up and down as they do in the states.

When it came time for the trial run, the two men climbed up the platform and looked down on the gathering crowd. They knew what they had to “do,” but they decided to shoot fingers to see who got to “do it.”

The businessman who "won" (or "lost," depending on how you look at it) put on the harness and dove off the platform. When he came up the first time, his partner noticed that his nose was bloody. When he came up the second time, it was obvious that one eye was turning black. And when he came up a third time, part of his ear was missing.

The one partner on the platform yelled out, “Are you okay?” And on his way down a fourth time, his partner yelled back, “What's a piñata?”

## **Life is Difficult**

Do you suppose these two businessmen could relate to the old saying, “Life is difficult”? Does anyone know where this phrase comes from?

There are certain books that are known for their first lines. For example, where does this line come from? “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” What book? Charles Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*.

But back to the words “Life is difficult”? Do you know what book those words come from? You got it. “Life is difficult” are the opening words of one of the best-selling books of the '80s and '90s: *The Road Less Traveled* by M. Scott Peck. When Scott Peck wrote *The Road Less Traveled* in 1981, we were beginning to experience just how difficult life could be from a variety of perspectives, in what many were beginning to call a new postmodern world.

The modern world was breaking up and fragmenting and another world – the postmodern world -- was being born. In that one breakup, however, there was also an avalanche of other breakups: careers were breaking up and changing, families were breaking up and down and changing, businesses and corporations were beginning to break up and change, and countries were beginning to come apart. We were beginning to realize that we were educated to live and move and have our being in a world that no longer existed.

Yes, life was difficult, and life hasn't gotten any easier since then – a great deal of ups and downs, to be sure!

## **Yes, life is difficult, but...**

That's what we want to talk about today. Yes, life is difficult, but there is also the way of hope. Yes, life is difficult, but there is also faith. Yes, there are many ups and downs, but God is good.

In our lesson from the Letter to the Hebrews, we learn about this way of hope by realizing how it is grounded in faith: yes, faith gives birth to hope, and hope, as Paul says in Romans, does not disappoint us (5:5).

Hope reminds us that even in the worst of times, God is with us. Hope says to us that even when life is difficult, there is a way through our difficulties. Hope is a gift.

I am reminded of that great scene in the movie the *Shawshenk Redemption*, where Red (played by Morgan Freeman) tells Andy Dufresne (played by Tim Robbins) that hope is a dangerous thing.

The reason Red felt hope was dangerous was because hope can get us to think the end is near, but then it never comes. And after being denied parole year after year, Red was losing hope. Andy Dufresne, on the other hand, had something else in mind: hope as freedom.

That's what hope can do! Hope can tell us there is something to live for; there is another future worth fighting for, even worth dying for.

That's why, I suppose, hope is dangerous: hope can spark us to do what folks say can't be done!

Like Abraham and Sarah, who were old and barren without children: God called them to a new future and they obeyed; they left their homeland behind and they set out for a new land of promise, not always knowing what the future held for them (Genesis 12:1-3a; Hebrews 11:8-16).

To be sure, Abraham and Sarah couldn't see it at first, but by faith and obedience, the promise, the hope, became a reality (Hebrews 11:8-13).

That's what hope can do: hope can carry our faith to the finish line. Hope can assure us that our faith in what is invisible (in God) will become visible (in mission).

That's what hope does! Hope provides a kind of confidence or substance that our faith will bring forth fruit – good fruit (Hebrews 11:1-3).

Perhaps we cannot see such fruit in the present, but hope keeps us looking forward because our trust, our faith, in God keeps us grounded, even when we can't see the results. It is why we really cannot separate faith and hope – and love (1 Corinthians 13:11).

Indeed, I like to think of hope and faith in terms of a corn field: We look out on a field and we see the crops. But what we don't often see is what is under the

ground, or under the surface – the soil, the nutrients, the roots. How can we trust that what is happening out of sight will bring forth fruit into full view?

### **What Gives Us Hope**

As we end a calendar year, as we move into a new calendar year, we want to look backwards and forwards and ask: what gives you hope? What gives us hope as a church? What are we looking forward to?

And so, to share in a time of hope, I thought it would be good to have Pastor Jenothy come and also share in a time of hope, or in a time of looking forward.

But to look forward we also need, I think, to look back, and by looking back, I mean looking at where God has been working on us, or nudging and calling us.

So, let's start where we were a year ago: as we look back, where have we seen God at work?

Pastor Jenothy, where have you seen God at work, giving hope?

The Schrader Youth Center is an example of hope and faith in action: we certainly had in mind what it would mean for our youth, but we didn't see what other kinds of ministries were going to blossom as well.

Another example is the Christmas Dinner. Ten years ago, we couldn't see what God was leading us to do, but it has become more than we imagined. More was happening beneath the service.

Example of Bridges Alliance: we know there are needs to assist people to get out of poverty. We met, talked, prayed, hoped and God birthed a new program.

It is also not an accident that Our Journey of Hope Ministry is going to begin soon: to walk with persons who have cancer. Again, we talked and prayed and dreamed: now, we can see the fruit.

Brooke's Place is another example. And on and on it goes – with Women's Ministries, and Caring Ministries, and Youth and Children's Ministries. There are Music and Worship Ministries, and more and more outreach ministries.

God has led us through the year.

## **What about the Future?**

To be sure, we cannot rest on our laurels. To rest on our laurels would mean an absence of faith, or a lack of trust.

And it's why we want to look forward to a new year. It's why we want to focus more and more on Small Groups and Small Group Leaders. And on Ongoing Stewardship Training. We also need to complete our kitchen and see how God can use it in ways we didn't anticipate.

What are you hoping for in 2019? What are you hoping for?

Think of 2019 as a trip into the future. Think of Abraham and Sarah, going from one place to another, or of Mary, the mother of Jesus, going from peasant girl to mother of the Messiah.

And think of the church in 2019 more and more in terms of a travel agency. That is, as a travel agency, how we can help and assist YOU in finding out where God is leading you to go? How can we help you book your journey of faith and invite you to go where God is leading you?

Think of where you are on a map of spiritual growth and where is God calling you to go next? In terms of your relationship with God? In terms of your involvement in helping others? In terms of your time in a small group? In terms of your commitment to giving? Where is God calling you to do next?

Because given where we have been, we know we have more places to go, or more ministry to develop and more persons to invite to faith.

Indeed, the new year reminds us that our journey is more like a long-obedience in the same direction than a short-sprint: more like work horse than show horse: Nothing fancy or spectacular, but more faithful and hopeful – more convinced that God is doing a new thing, whether we see it now or not!

May it be so! Amen.